

14

Rev. Dr. Bacon's Sermon

BEFORE THE

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS,

PREACHED AT TROY, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 7, 1852.

The Relation of Faith to Missions.

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT TROY, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 7, 1852,

BEFORE THE

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS,

AT THEIR

FORTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING.

BY LEONARD BACON, D. D.

OF NEW HAVEN, CONN.

B O S T O N :

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN, 42 CONGRESS ST.

1852.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

SERMON.

IN other meetings of this great missionary convocation, business is to be transacted, reports are to be presented and discussed, and various inquiries are to be prosecuted respecting our plans and methods of evangelization. But this evening we meet exclusively for the higher purpose of worship and Christian edification. We are here that we may bring ourselves, with our great work upon us, into the immediate and felt presence of Him who heareth prayer, and that we may receive from the ministration of his word some appropriate lesson of instruction, admonition or encouragement. He who by your appointment, fathers and brethren, speaks to you on this occasion, is required to speak not as a debater to aid the progress of discussion and the dispatch of business, not as a lecturer to unfold the philosophy, or to trace out the incidental bearings of the missionary work, but simply as a minister of the word of God. Yet, on the other hand, it is

not needful, in such a presence as this, to insist on those first principles which every pastor has occasion to inculcate, from time to time, when he urges upon his flock that great command of the Redeemer to his followers, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." These fathers and brethren, coming together from so many different regions of our common country, for the very purpose of conference on the progress of the work which Christ by that command committed to his followers, and of devising the methods and the means by which its progress may be promoted; these missionaries, returned from so many distant lands with their reports of what God has wrought, and with their plea for help in the work to which their life is consecrated and in which they hope to die; these youthful sons and daughters of the church, self-devoted to the same toils and perils, and looking forward to the time when they too shall go far hence to the Gentiles,—what shall the preacher say to them?

Brethren, what we want at such an hour as this, is to remember and realize the true nature and character of the work in behalf of which we are assembled, and which is the bond of our union. We want to realize what kind of a work it is for which this missionary institution exists, and what the grand distinction is between this and all secular undertakings. I have, therefore, selected as the words of Holy Writ, which are to guide and fix the meditations of this hour, that testimony from the

Apostle Paul, so descriptive of the Christian life in its simplest yet sublimest aspect,—

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 7.

WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT.

The phraseology of the text needs no explanation, certainly not in such an assembly as this. Nor need I dwell upon the exposition of these words as descriptive of the Christian life in general. He whom Christ hath taught, and whom the Spirit of God hath awakened and illuminated, is a *believer*, that is, he accepts the reality of things beyond the reach of sense. To him the life and immortality which Christ has brought to light, and the eternal salvation of which Christ is the author, are not dreams or uncertainties, but substantial realities. To him, the presence, the government, the character of God; to him, the work of redemption and the glory of the Redeemer; to him, the intrinsic beauty of holiness, the intrinsic evil of sin, and the connection which God has established between transgression and retribution; to him, the exceeding great and precious promises, by which men fallen and polluted are raised to a participation in “the divine nature,”—are the great realities of his existence. In his view, the things that are seen, the things of earth and time, the objects of selfish and sensual affection, are overshadowed by the surpassing and substantial grandeur of things invisible and eternal. To walk by faith and not by sight, is characteristic

of every Christian who does not wholly dishonor the Christian name.

What I propose, is to speak of the missionary enterprise under this aspect. Inasmuch as it is distinctively Christian, it is essentially an enterprise and work of faith. So far as it is simply and truly what it professes to be, the enterprise of converting the world to Christ, it must needs derive its motives, its supports and encouragements, its steadfast hope, from beyond the sphere of the things which are seen, and must look habitually at the things which are unseen and eternal. In order to sustain itself, it must walk by faith, not by sight. This is the point to be illustrated in the present discourse. How is it that, in this work of going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature, we walk by faith?

I. We are constrained to walk by faith in this work of evangelizing the nations, because the enterprise presupposes, as its starting point, a full conviction that the gospel is a true revelation from God. Here our enterprise begins. If any ask us why we concern ourselves about the propagation of the gospel, our first and most comprehensive answer is, because the gospel is true. God who spake to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son. In the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, we have a series of facts and testimonies in which God is revealed, and a way of salvation for sinners is laid open. In these holy records, things unseen are made known to us ;

the veil is lifted, as it were, which hides eternity ; the relations of the soul to its Creator, and the ends for which it has its being, are made palpable to the conscience ; and men, receiving the testimony and believing it, become acquainted with God, not merely as an abstract philosophic theory which explains and harmonizes the phenomena of the universe, nor as the conclusion of an argument which they cannot logically resist ; not as a necessity of their intelligent and moral nature, nor as the objective creation of that mysterious yearning which must have something for the soul to fear and worship ; but as revealed through the medium of distinct and intelligible facts. We believe these facts ; we hold them as certainties, and therefore we undertake to publish them and to spread the knowledge of them among all nations. Our enterprise founds itself, in the first instance, on a firm confidence in “ this faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; ” for it is nothing else than the attempt to propagate that conviction through the world. Thus the missionary work, in the very simplest conception of it, is a work of faith. It does not walk by sight. It does not found itself upon the things that are seen. It accepts the gospel as a divine revelation to mankind. It rests upon the conviction that the gospel is truth of infinite moment to the world.

But there are also definite and particular views of things unseen, certain specific exercises of faith, by which this great work is justified, and which

sustain and encourage us in the enterprise. For example, to men who regard the matter only in the light of philosophy, our undertaking seems preposterous and impracticable, even on the supposition that the religion which we attempt to propagate is the true religion. ‘Christianity,’ they say, ‘is the religion of civilized and intellectual nations only. Its doctrines are such as exercise the loftiest and most cultivated intellects. Look at the theology taught in our schools, set forth in our confessions of faith, expounded in our pulpits; how preposterous the notion of carrying such a theology to men of other races, to barbarous men, to men who have no power of grasping abstractions, and who have no conception of anything which does not strike their senses! How preposterous the idea of carrying to painted warriors of the wilderness, to the tattooed islanders of the Pacific, to Hottentots or Tartars, that body of religious doctrines which is contained in Calvin’s Institutes or Hopkins’s System of Divinity! How unreasonable the expectation, that such specimens of our common human nature will be brought to feel an interest in a religion made up of doctrines so elevated, so abstract, so difficult even to minds invigorated by the discipline of study and refined by civilized culture! These degraded and barbarous races must first be subjected to some humanizing influence, and to some process of intellectual renovation, before they can receive the doctrines of Protestant Evangelical Christianity. Meanwhile they must be addressed

through the medium of their senses. They must have a religion of ceremonies. Give them pictures then, and crucifixes, for the culture and development of religious sensibility, instead of the doctrine of an invisible and spiritual God, who must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. Give them the mystic efficacy of the baptismal water, instead of the doctrine of regeneration. Give them the wafer duly consecrated, instead of the doctrine of justification by faith. Give them the easy and salutary lesson of subjection to priestly authority, instead of appeals to judgment and conscience, and the doctrine of immediate and personal responsibility to God. And when they shall cease to be barbarians, when they shall have attained to some higher mark on the scale of intellectual and moral development, then they will be capable of a more spiritual religion.'

Such, very naturally, are the reasonings of those who, while they admit the truth of the Christian system in general, regard the propagation of the gospel in no higher light than that of philosophical speculation. The answer to all such reasonings is, that in thus undertaking to convert the world to Christ, we walk by faith, not by sight. For,

II. This missionary work is a work of faith, inasmuch as it assumes, not only that the gospel is true, and therefore ought to be published through the world, but also that the gospel is adapted to the universal need of human nature, and is therefore capable of being universally propagated. In other

words, the principle on which Paul acted, and which gave him courage to preach the gospel at Rome, is the principle which makes us ready to preach the same gospel, in all the world, to every creature. The principle is this, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The gospel, when fairly exhibited by patient teaching, and by its natural and unostentatious showing of itself in the form of living character, can make its way into the most benighted human mind, and can become effectual to touch the latent springs of sensibility in the most degraded and uncultured soul. The mere philosopher, in his speculations on the propagation and progress of Christianity, is prone to forget that the matter of the Christian religion, as it is first proposed to attention and to faith, is not abstract or scientific, but distinctively historical, and is accordingly level to every apprehension. Is there any land or language in which the simple historic religion of the Bible cannot be made intelligible? The story of the creation and the apostacy; the story of the world's wickedness and of the world's destruction by the deluge; the long and eventful story of the people whom God chose for his own, whom he guarded and taught and nurtured, and who requited his bounty with so much unthankfulness and disobedience; in a word, the comprehensive story in which all the lessons of the Old Testament are involved, is everywhere intelligible;

and wherever that story finds its way, there the idea of God's true character begins to be shaped in the mind, and those sensibilities which are essential to the knowledge of sin and of salvation from sin, begin to be developed. The story of Jesus Christ, "God manifest in the flesh;" the story of Bethlehem and Nazareth, and of him in whom dwelt all the fullness of the godhead bodily while yet he had not where to lay his head; the story of Gethsemane and of Calvary; the story of the crucifixion, and of that new sepulchre, and of that rising from the dead, and of that going up to reign in the invisible glory; that story can be told in every language, and there is no human soul so degraded as to be incapable of learning from it the mystery of godliness. Wherever the gospel story goes, carrying with it the entire historical religion of the Old and New Testaments, there the human soul awakes from the lethargy of even the profoundest ignorance; there the mind begins to inquire and meditate on things that are infinite and eternal; there the vast problems of our mysterious existence, over which philosophy wearies itself in vain, begin to receive attention and to find their solution; there the living oracles, explored and studied, give out a light that shines through all the realms of thought; there the sublimest doctrines of the Christian revelation, the doctrines that underlie the story of redemption and are incorporated with it, will have their place in the experience of believers, and while speculation is baffled with their vastness, faith will

grasp them as realities. This is the adaptedness of the gospel to the universal need of human nature. It lies beyond the ken of any philosophy, that does not know the power as well as the form of godliness. But this we take for a first principle, when we undertake to preach the gospel to every creature. In the comprehensiveness of our enterprise, as in the fellowship of the redeemed, "there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free;" for our work presupposes that as Christ died for all, so wherever there is a soul with human faculties and sensibilities, there is in that soul a capacity of being moved by the story of Christ and him crucified. Thus we walk by faith, not by sight.

There is another aspect of the missionary work, which does not present itself to any but a believing mind. Admitting that the body of facts and doctrines, called Christianity, is true, the man who contemplates the question of its progress in no other light than that of human speculation, will naturally argue that this religion, making its way in the world as a system of thought and belief, must make its way under the same conditions and chances with any other body of opinions equally sustained by evidence; and that it will be liable to be overwhelmed and even extinguished, in some of those great and often unaccountable mutations which make up so much of human history. No religion, as yet, has ever become universal. All religions, whatever measure of truth they have had in them, have been liable

to revolution and decay. One system of thought and faith has been superseded by another, which in its turn has passed away ; nor are such changes always for the better. Christianity itself emerged, at its origin, from a quarter from which no great revolution could have been expected ; and who can tell that some new system may not come forth, from some source not now dreamed of, and triumph over Christendom ? To all such reasonings, the mind that thinks in accordance with that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, has a conclusive answer. For,

III. The undertaking to convert the world to Christ is a work of faith, inasmuch as it rests on the basis of Christ's commission and promises to his disciples.

If we went forth to such an enterprise as this, unsent—if the work were simply, and in all respects, a voluntary undertaking of our own—if we were acting under no guidance other than our own wisdom, and under no authority other than our own will—we could have no assurance of success. But we remember, for our encouragement, that the church of Christ, in the sense in which we are laboring for its extension, is not a merely human institution. Every particular church—every organized and governed local society of Christian worshipers—however conformed to scriptural principles and models, is, in one view, a human organization ; there is no certainty, no divine pledge, that its candlestick will not be removed, or that its light

will not become darkness. Any definite confederation of churches, under whatever system of ecclesiastical laws, is a human arrangement; it may live and flourish, and be filled from age to age with the light of a pure and saving gospel; or, on the other hand, it may become corrupt, it may apostatize from the truth, it may perish and be dissolved. But there is a church, which has no parochial or national boundaries, and which is defined by no human regulations or arrangements,—the Church of the living God, “built on the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone;”—the divine institution which Christ announced to his disciples when he said, “On this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” In this sense of the word, the church is universal and immortal; it is the goodly fellowship of the apostles, the noble army of Christ’s witnesses, the commonwealth of the saints, the glorious community of which Christ is the living head, and which includes all those in every age and clime, whom faith unites to their Redeemer. It is in this sense of the word, and not in any narrow, local, national, or sectarian sense, that we are laboring to extend the church. The coming of the kingdom of God—that is, the extension of the church considered as the universal commonwealth of the redeemed—is what we pray for, what we labor for; and in this work we act under Christ’s commission and with the assurance of his presence. It is his work; he is in it, the Captain

of our salvation ; he, personally though invisibly present, is leading his hosts from conquering to conquer ; and “ the gates of hell ” — the councils and enterprises of Death and Hades—shall never triumph over him.

Is not Christ with us in this enterprise ? If he is not, all our faith is vain, and our hope also is vain. If he is not with us, personally with us—our guide, our strength, and the assurance of our success—what dependence can there be upon his testimonies ? The doctrine of Christ’s continued and unfailing presence in his church—in the universal spiritual church, which is his body, “ the fullness of him who filleth all in all ”—is one of the most explicit lessons of the New Testament. What is that doctrine ? Christ himself, in almost the only discourse of his which seems expressly to anticipate the organized association of his disciples under any distinct form of religious polity, says, “ Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I, in the midst of them.” [Matt. xviii. 20.] So, when he speaks to his disciples of his departure, and promises to give them another Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, he adds, “ I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.” [John xiv. 18 ; see also the following verses.] “ Ye shall see me.” “ Ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” “ He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” “ If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will

come to him, and make our abode with him." Such were the promises and assurances which our Savior gave before his crucifixion. See now the fulfillment of the promise. He dies and is buried, and on the third day he is "declared to be the Son of God, with power, by the resurrection from the dead." On that third day, and afterwards from time to time for the space of forty days, he manifests himself to his desponding and incredulous disciples; they see his human form; they hear his human voice; their intercourse with him is renewed; and thus his living, personal presence in his church, becomes, to them not merely a matter of expectation, but a matter of fact; not merely a matter of faith resting upon the promises he had given them, but a matter testified to them by their outward senses. He shows himself, now, to a solitary weeper in the gray morning twilight of that first day of the week on which he rose; now to two disciples walking together, and talking with downcast hearts of the things which had happened. Once and again, especially on the first day of the week, the disciples are assembled in an upper chamber, with the doors shut for fear of their enemies; and lo! suddenly, there he is in the midst of them, according to his promise. Thus, by these repeated manifestations, and by the manner in which he manifests himself, he makes them familiar with the fact, not of his resurrection only, but of his constant though invisible presence with them. He has not left them orphans, but has come to them. The world seeth him no more, but they see him. It is only to

them, and not to the world, that he thus manifests himself. He is with them, and with them only. He loves them; and they grow strong and joyous in the consciousness that he is with them, a living and mighty presence, invisible and unknown to the world that has rejected him. At last, after some forty days of frequent intercourse with them by these visible manifestations, he is "taken up," and passes finally out of their sight. But before he thus withdraws from their sight and from the cognizance of every outward sense, he gives them a renewed and explicit commission to attempt the propagation of his gospel through the world, and he renews the promise that in that work he will be unfailingly present with them. "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you alway even to the end of the world." [Matt. xxviii. 18-20.] What was the meaning of that promise given in those circumstances, given in such a connection with his final departure out of their sight? It was as if he had said, Ye shall see me no more with the outward eye; these manifestations of my presence are sufficient, as evidence of my resurrection from the dead, and of my mediatorial power on earth and in heaven; and henceforth my presence will no more be cognizable to sense, yet I am with you alway, even to the end of the world. "So then, after *the*

Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God ; and they went forth and preached everywhere, *the Lord* working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.” [Mark xvi. 19, 20.] In some sense then,—in some sense distinct from the general doctrine of the divine omnipresence,—it is a doctrine of the New Testament that Christ is always present with his church ; always present with his believing followers in their consultations and enterprises for his cause, though only two or three are gathered together ; always present, especially in the work of preaching the gospel to every creature. However we may attempt to expound this doctrine, to define its consistency with our philosophy, to guard it against the perversions of enthusiasm and of superstition, or to bring it into the form of a logical and scientific statement, we must take heed that we do not explain it away, or paralyze its inspiring potency on the believing mind.

Our enterprise, then, of spreading the gospel through the world, is not our own, but Christ’s. It rests upon this great Christian fact,—the fact that the risen and reigning Savior lives in the life of his church, reigns in its affection and fidelity, and conquers in its progress. Christ is with us in this work as really ; his power, his love, his guardianship, are as really with us ; his sympathy in our vicissitudes, and his interest in our success and ultimate victory, are as real, as if the sacred form that

was so often exhibited to the adoring gaze of his disciples before the day of his ascension, were visible among us from age to age,—as if the same voice which uttered the Sermon on the Mount, which prayed at Gethsemane, which groaned at Calvary, and which gave out its parting accents on the eastern slope of Olivet, were heard to-day in our assemblies. Faith realizes that the work is Christ's; that his commission is its warrant; and that his presence in it is the assurance of its ultimate success. There may be times of discouragement; defeat may follow upon defeat; the enemy may come like a flood in his hour and in the power of darkness; but, knowing that Christ hath sent us and is with us, we will not despair, for “by faith, not by sight,” is the word upon our banners. The waves may roar, and men's hearts may fail them for fear; but Christ is with us in the ship; all that is hazarded is his; and when the wind and the storm cease to subserve his interest and to fulfill his word, the voice of his power shall awe them into silence.

But we are already approaching another aspect of the missionary work, and one which deserves to be, in its turn, distinctly regarded. To a mind which looks at the subject only in a theoretical view, and in the lights of merely human wisdom, the prodigious disproportion between our enterprise and our resources, between the end at which we aim and the means by which we hope to attain that end, may seem to convict us of enthusiasm, not to

say absurdity. Our field is the world, a world that lieth in wickedness; and what are we and what are our resources, that we should undertake the work of extending through this whole world the kingdom and dominion of the Redeemer? All sorts of hindrances and obstacles are in our way. How large a portion of mankind are sunk in utter barbarism! How profound is the darkness of popular ignorance in the greater part of even the civilized world! How adverse to human progress, and especially to the influence of the gospel, are almost all existing governments! How much of injustice and organized wickedness is everywhere wrought into the very structure of society! How strong too are the diverse systems of false religion which cover the earth as with the shadow of death! how strong in their antiquity, in their association with government, in the wealth and the craft of their various priesthoods, and in their connection with the daily outward and inward life of the nations they enslave! And what resources have we for the conquest of a world like this? In one way of viewing things, the contributions made for the spread of the gospel through the world, may seem quite considerable. Perhaps half a million of dollars, or even more, is annually contributed in the United States for the various departments of the foreign missionary work as carried on by different Christian organizations. Perhaps not less than three times that amount is annually contributed for the same work by the churches of Great Britain. Such are our material

resources for the enterprise of publishing the gospel in the translation of its written records, and of preaching the gospel by the living voice, in every language and to every people under heaven. If such resources seem large to us, if they seem in any measure adequate to the end in view, it is enough to remember that a single year of war, like our own late war for the conquest of Mexico, involves more expenditure of treasure and of life than the contributions of a generation, at the present rate, for the conversion of the world. What are these few hundred men and women, scattered here and there among the countless millions of the unevangelized in Turkey, Persia, India, China, Africa and the Islands? Can they revolutionize governments and emancipate the nations? Can they demolish the fabrics which the superstition of ages has erected and consolidated? Can they produce any where any permanent effect?

Such doubts and objections are natural, whenever the mind falls into an unbelieving mood of thought. The answer with which we meet them—the only conclusive answer—is that in this work we walk by faith, not by sight. Or, putting the answer into the form adapted to this particular class of objections, we say,

IV. Our faith, in taking up and pursuing the work of the world's conversion, rests upon God's revealed plan and counsel concerning the world's redemption. In other words, the missionary work, in the true spirit and meaning of it, believes, and is

sustained by the belief, that the entire providence of God in this world, including all the special outpourings of his Spirit from time to time, is conducted with reference to the subjection of the world to Christ.

The view which recognizes God's redeeming and restoring work as involved in the arrangements of his providence, and developed along the track of ages past, is the Christian view of history. Without Christ and his mission—without Christ's conflict with the powers of darkness, and his final and predestined victory over all his enemies—without Christ's kingdom, spreading in the world from age to age, and ultimately filling the world with righteousness and peace and joy,—the history of this world is only a dark and tangled maze. Without the knowledge of Christ, and of God's counsel concerning the kingdom and work of Christ, there is no clue to guide the inquirer through the endless labyrinth. But going up into the mount of vision with the prophets of God, and there beholding Christ transfigured and glorified, and thence looking forth upon the ages which history has chronicled, we see events in their connection with God's government of the world and with the designs which he is pursuing, and lo! the "mighty maze" is not "without a plan."

This recognition of the method and system of God's universal providence, is the Christian view of the world as it lies before us, and of the events now passing into history. To the eye of faith, Christ is

continually the central figure in the ever changing world-panorama. God's decree concerning his anointed King, [Ps. ii. 7-9,] "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee: ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession; thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"—stands unreversed; and all the progress of events is the working of God's providence to bring to pass that irreversible decree.

This, too, is the Christian view of what is yet to be. The light of prophecy from ancient time streams on, beyond the present, into the remotest future. Christ, in his mediatorial work of glory—Christ, in his kingdom among men—Christ, subduing and renewing all things, and going on with ceaseless progress to restore the ruin caused by the world's apostasy from God, is in all coming time no less than in the ages past, the centre in the system of universal providence. Around him all events however fortuitous they may seem, and all influences however adverse in their nature and their immediate bearing, have their places in a due subordination to the plan which he is executing. And as time performs its cycles, all things move on with him toward the predestined consummation.

"Thus heavenward all things tend; for all were once,
Perfect, and all must be at length restored.
So God has greatly purposed, who would else
In his dishonored work himself endure
Dishonor, and be wronged without redress."

See then how far we are from depending on our own means and resources, as if they were adequate to the work of subduing the world to Christ. The very grandeur of the undertaking requires us to walk by faith, not by sight. We walk by faith in this great fact of the Christian religion, the fact of God's purpose to bring the whole world, in the fullness of time, under the dominion of his Son. All our plans and endeavors, all our hopes of success, are grounded on our confidence in that great scheme of providence which he has been pursuing in all past ages, and which he will continue to pursue till the new earth shall be arrayed in more than all the beauty and bloom of the original paradise. Our work is simply that of serving God in the gospel of his Son. In order to the universal establishment of the kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, the gospel of the kingdom must be published everywhere; and the revealed method of God's operation for the completion of his great design, requires that the gospel shall be published not by miracle but by human instrumentality—published by the process of giving to all nations the translated record of the Divine revelation, and teaching all men to read and understand it for themselves—published by the living voice proclaiming the story of Christ and the message of divine invitation in every language and to every creature. This is the work to which God calls us as his servants, as the stewards whom he has intrusted with the gospel for the world, as the redeemed followers

of Christ. We are to publish the gospel every where as we have opportunity, to the extent of our resources, according to our best ability and skill; and the result is sure, because the result is his—his heart is fixed upon it; his immutable purpose has determined it. With the same word of prophecy with which he encouraged his people of old, when, few and feeble, they were building the holy city and the temple in the presence of their enemies, he now encourages us, [Zach. iv. 6, 7,] “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings, crying, Grace! grace unto it!”

The work, then, is not ours alone, nor need we be dismayed at the slenderness of our resources, or at the obstacles that rise like mountains in our way. The work is God’s. All the ages groan and travail, as it were, in pain together, till it be accomplished. We are only standing in our lot, and doing the little that is assigned to us in our subordination to the grand design of the eternal providence. And if we would refresh and strengthen our faith in God as the author and finisher of this work, we have only to look back a little and remember what God hath wrought; we have only to look abroad upon the field as it is, and consider the present operation of his hands.

Think what was the position of the church, and

Picture to yourself the world as it was no longer ago than when David Brainerd was girding himself to his work, and then look at it as we now portray it on our maps for the monthly concert of prayer, dotted on every continent and ocean and in every darkest and most barbarous land, with the luminous points of evangelical influence. Who planned, who brought to pass this great change? What hath God wrought?

What is God working now? It is not for us to cast down the thrones of oppression that stand in our way. It is not for us to unchain the enslaved and struggling races of mankind so that they may receive the gospel. It is not for us to open highways of commerce and of travel across the ocean and into the wildernesses. God is doing all that in the development of his providence. And more than all that, he pours out his Spirit to renew the face of the earth, to kindle life when all was death; and the seed which we sow so sparingly and with so little faith, springs up and waves like Lebanon. O what is God working at this moment for that great cause which gathers us in this assembly! In how many a darkened mind is the new consciousness of relations to the invisible and eternal world, beginning at this moment to kindle into light under the influence of his Spirit. In how many a barbarous language, are the redeemed and renewed from among the heathen singing at this moment with melody in their hearts unto God! The universal providence of that almighty love to which we min-

ister, prepares our way and leads us forth. The Spirit that moved on the primeval chaos, bringing forth out of that confusion, order, beauty, life and blessedness, is also the Author of that new creation toward which all things in this disordered world are tending, and in which we have our humble work to do. He who sent his Son that the world might be redeemed, will not fail to send his Spirit also, that the world may be renewed. This confidence sustains us. Without it we could have no courage for so arduous and vast an enterprise.

Let me say, in conclusion, that the subject which has been so inadequately represented in this discourse, illustrates the mutual relation between the foreign missionary work and the spiritual health of the churches. The work, as a work of faith, grounding itself from first to last on the reality of things not seen, deriving its encouragements and all its vital motives from the revealed word of God, calls faith into exercise, and invigorates by activity the principle of faith. And faith, living and active, inspiring high sympathies, prompting to apostolic enterprises, transfusing Christian truth into the affections, and translating it into action, while it feeds on the truth as it is in Jesus, and can have no other aliment, is also conservative of truth, and is its best and surest guardian. Let us press onward then in the work of subduing the world to Christ. Whatever hindrances, at home or abroad, may obstruct its progress; whatever temporary disasters may come upon it; however the blessing of

success, upon one field of labor and another, may seem to linger on its way from heaven, let us work on as workers with God; for we cannot abandon this enterprise, or relax our efforts in it, without renouncing the faith in which we have begun, and losing our hold on things invisible and eternal. We cannot grow slothful or faint in such a work as this, without sinking into a spiritual apathy that shall spread itself through the churches, from land to land, till all the power and life of godliness shall be extinguished, and nothing shall remain of truth or of devotion but cold and stony forms.

So, on the other hand, if the life and power of godliness are permitted to decline in our churches; if thus the truth, the pure gospel of Christ, is obscured by dead traditions, and superseded by barren speculations; if our churches become worldly and corrupt, losing at once the doctrine and spirit of Christ, all our enterprises for the conversion of the world will fail. The work is all, from first to last, a work of faith; and where faith, as a principle, a spiritual affection, a living force in the hearts of the redeemed, grows faint and cold, there all the nerves of feeling and of action in this work are first relaxed, then paralyzed. Oh for the presence of the Holy Spirit in all our hearts, in all our churches! Oh for the unfailing presence of that promised Comforter, teaching us all things, bringing all things to our remembrance—all Christ's glories, all his testimonies, all his promises, taking of the things of Christ and showing them to us! Oh for that

inward and immediate intercourse with God, which brings the soul into harmony with truth, and which makes the truth luminous. Oh for those illuminations beaming on the soul whose life is hid with Christ in God; those earnest apprehensions of divine and eternal things; that intense appreciation of the gospel in the simplicity and grandeur of its doctrines, before which the formalism of dead traditions and the formalism of irreverent speculation are, both alike, rebuked and subdued! Then should we arise to this great work with a more self-renouncing zeal, and with a more steadfast and inspiring confidence. Then would the word of God run and be glorified. Then should we see "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven." Then would there be heard, ere long, over all the renewed and blooming earth, a voice from heaven, saying, "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God."

